

Homily For Tuesday of the 3rd Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am/7:00pm Masses - Jan 25, 2022

(Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle)

Acts 22:3-16 "Regain your sight, for you will be the witness of the God of our ancestors to all the world."

Psalm 17:1-2 "Go out to all the world and tell the good news."

Mark 16:15-18 "Go out to all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."

No Going Back

Introduction

I know that many people really like movies with big special effects: car chases, explosions, lights. I don't. I just like a good story. I find that movie makers try so hard to be visually stunning that it just distracts from the most important thing that is going on, which is people living out their stories.

Today, though, we celebrate Jesus our Lord, entering into the great story of salvation history with some pretty amazing special effects. Yes, we are celebrating the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, but it is, most importantly, a celebration of the love of God, the good news which goes out into all the world.

Mark

Our brief passage from the Gospel of Mark tells us how the process goes. Those close to him have already had their various conversions. Some are dramatic, like Peter with the great catch of fish, and some less dramatic, like Philip and Andrew going from followers of John the Baptist to Jesus, with seemingly little fuss.

Their conversions have already taken place, they have spent three years learning to live and love like the master, and now they are being sent to proclaim the Good News. That's the process: conversion to Christ, becoming a disciple, baptism, and proclamation of the good news to others.

The Psalmist could not have imagined how it was going to happen, yet says clearly, "Go out to all the world and tell the good news. For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever."

Acts

In Luke's telling of the story of the early Church, the Book of Acts, three times we hear the story of Paul's conversion. Luke tells what happened in Chapter 9 of Acts. I chose to focus on Luke's record of Paul's own telling of the story. It is his personal testimony.

Besides the actual events of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension, this is the most powerful evidence of God fulfilling the promise that the message of salvation will go out to all the world. Within two years of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is a turning point in the history of the Church because through St. Paul the Good News will go out to all the world.

Saul's primary motivation was his zeal for the faith, not violence, even though he stood by at the stoning of Stephen. After that, the worst persecutor of the early Christian movement hears that the Christian community is growing in Damascus. Lots of Jews lived there. It was a gateway location to the east. He was afraid that the movement would spread to the east. Later that will be the first place he preaches as a Christian.

Here is where the big story of salvation history is so fascinating. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, just like the most famous man of that same tribe, Saul, the first king of Israel. Old Testament Saul pursued and persecuted David, God's anointed. New Testament Saul is like him, an important Benjamite, who persecutes God's anointed sons and daughters.

Jesus is revealed to him as a manifestation of light, the light of the risen Christ, and a reflection of light at creation (Gen 1:3). Struck blind for three days and fasts reminding us of Jesus in the tomb, who eats immediately after rising. It is like Paul was dead, with no sight.

Pope Benedict XVI writes "It was precisely on the road to Damascus that Paul says "Christ made me his own (Phil 3:12). In his letters he goes directly to the essential and speaks not only of a vision but of an illumination in the encounter with the risen one. He was an apostle by the will of God (2 Cor 1:1) as if to emphasize that his conversion was not the result of a development of thought or reflection, but the fruit of divine intervention an unforeseeable, divine grace.

Notice that Jesus identifies himself with the Church: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME?" Paul will take that great revelation and make it his explanation of the Church as the Body of Christ. The Church is one with Jesus, not just an institution with all its sinners, but a mystical body. .

Paul turns to the light and says "who are you, Kyrios (Lord)." Jesus responds to Paul with "I am," like God did to Moses. Jesus is affirmed once again as the great "I am." A few chapters later, Paul's retelling of the story at his trial before Agrippa, includes Jesus' words, "I send you to the Gentiles, to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.

Call To Conversion

Paul's is an amazing conversion story. However, every Christian has a story of encountering Christ that should be shared. Conversion stories have power because they are real. That's why we must never exaggerate anything about our stories. If we try to embellish, it will fail. Our stories have power because they reveal Christ. I have heard many people, when asked to share their story of coming Christ, lament that they don't have an exciting story, like one that could be made into a movie. But, you know, I never get tired of hearing them. Because the important part of that story is the encounter with Christ, not the movie special effects.

What counts here is to place Jesus Christ at the centre of our lives, so that our identity is marked essentially by the encounter with Christ. We need to have a testimony of what has brought us to the Lord. It's not a very Catholic thing, but we need to stop listening to the world tell us that our religion should be private.

We have the responsibility to transmit this wonderful heritage to whatever extent we are able to. No matter how dark it looks out there, Jesus will bring light into the whole of creation. He always does.

Key Scripture Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *I know the one in whom I have believed.*

Collect: *O God, draw us nearer to you through the example of him whose conversion we celebrate today, and so make us witnesses to your truth in the world.*

Acts: *Paul spoke to the people in Jerusalem: "I am a Jew, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God. I persecuted this Way by binding men and women and putting them in prison. While I was approaching Damascus, about noon, a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? I answered, Who are you Lord? Then he said to me: I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting. I asked, What am I to do, Lord? The Lord said to me, Get up and go to Damascus. There you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do. I could not see because of the light. Ananias, a devout man said, Brother Saul, regain your sight, for you will be the witness of the God of our ancestors to all the world. Get up, be baptized and have your sins washed away.*

Psalm: *Go out to all the world and tell the good news. For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.*

Mark: *Jesus said to the eleven, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved. But the one who does not believe will be condemned.*